WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method for facilitating browsing of an electronic catalog of a merchant, comprising the steps of:

receiving a search query from a user;

applying the search query to the electronic catalog to generate a search results list;

displaying at least a portion of the search results list to the user for viewing; and

presenting the user an option to save the query for subsequent use as a user-defined category.

2.   The method as in Claim 1, wherein the step of presenting the user an option to save the query comprises prompting the user to enter a category name.

3.   The method as in Claim 1, further comprising:

storing the query as a user-defined category; and

presenting the user an option to browse the catalog using the user-defined category and a plurality of merchant-defined categories.

4.   The method as in Claim 1, further comprising:

comparing the query to a history of queries submitted by the user to search for substantially-identical query submissions; and

using the substantially-identical query submissions to automatically generate a personalized category for the user.

5.   An electronic commerce system, comprising:

a database which contains an electronic catalog of items;

a computer system coupled to the database and to a computer network; and

a software system which runs on the computer system and provides functions for users to at least (1) formulate queries for searching the catalog, (2)

assign names to individual queries, and (3) store the queries for subsequent use using said names, the software system thereby enabling users to create user-defined categories for browsing the catalog.

5   6.   The electronic commerce system as in Claim 5, wherein the software system automatically compares queries submitted by the same user to identify query resubmission events, and uses the query resubmission events to automatically create and /or suggest categories for users.

10   7.   A method for facilitating electronic commerce between a buyer and a seller, comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

providing a first user interface through which a buyer places orders with a seller and views the status of such orders, the first user interface including an option for the buyer to generate and send messages to the seller that are linked to

15   a particular order;

providing a second user interface through which the seller views and updates the status of such orders, the second user interface including an option for the seller to generate and send messages to the buyer that are linked to a particular order; and

20   in at least one of the first and second interfaces, displaying a log of the messages that are linked to a selected order, including messages generated by the buyer and messages generated by the seller.

8.   The method as in Claim 7, wherein the step of displaying a log

25   comprises displaying the log in a summary format in which portions of the messages are omitted.

9.   An electronic commerce system, comprising:

a computer system coupled to a publicly-accessible computer network, the computer system including:

a first user interface through which buyers place orders over the network with a merchant and view the status of such orders, the first interface including a message field for a buyer to generate and submit to the merchant messages that are linked to particular orders; and

a second user interface through which the merchant views the orders, including corresponding order-specific messages from buyers, and specifies the status of the orders, the second interface including a message field for the merchant to generate and submit messages to the buyers that are linked to specific orders;

wherein at least one of the first and the second user interfaces displays a history of the messages between the merchant and a buyer that are linked to a selected order.

10.   A method for facilitating the generation of an order of multiple items from an electronic catalog of items, comprising:

presenting a user an option to view the electronic catalog using multiple browsing modes, each browsing mode providing a respective method for identifying desired items in the catalog;

within each of the browsing modes, providing the user an option to select and specify quantities of items for prospective purchase; and

when the user views an item that has been selected for prospective purchase within any one of the browsing modes, automatically displaying a corresponding purchase quantity for the item.

11.   The method as in Claim 10, wherein the multiple browsing modes include (1) a search mode in which users generate and submit queries for searching the catalog, and (2) a category-based mode in which users browse the catalog using pre-existing item categories.

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12.   An electronic commerce system, comprising:

a database which contains an electronic catalog of items sold by a merchant;

a computer system coupled to the database and to a publicly-accessible computer network; and

a computer program which runs on the computer system and provides multiple browsing modes for buyers to browse the catalog and select items for prospective purchase, wherein the computer program displays to a buyer a quantity of each catalog item selected for prospective purchase throughout the multiple browsing modes, to thereby facilitate generating orders for multiple items.

13.   A method for facilitating the generation of an order from a catalog of items, comprising the steps of:

monitoring and recording selections of items by a user for prospective purchase;

generating a list of items which is responsive to at least one of (1) submission by the user of a query for searching the catalog, and (2) selection by the user of an item category for viewing; and

presenting the list of items to the user together with corresponding quantities values which indicate quantities of items selected for prospective purchase;

the method thereby allowing the user to browse the catalog while keeping track of the items selected for prospective purchase and their respective quantities.

14.   The method as in Claim 13, wherein the step of presenting the list comprises displaying a form in which the quantity values are displayed in item-specific fields that can be edited by the user, so that the user can modify the quantities while viewing the list.

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